

DRAFT MINUTES of the meeting of the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 3 July 2012 at 7.00pm.

- Present:** Councillors Diana Hale (Chair), Clare Baldwin, Mark Coxshall, Charles Curtis, James Halden, Cathy Kent
- Additional Members:** Mr S Cray – Parent/Governor Representative
Mrs P Wilson – RC Church Representative
Mr A McPherson – Parent/Governor Representative
- Apologies:** Rev D Rollins – Church of England Representative
- In attendance:** Ms C Littleton–Head of Learning and Universal Outcomes
Ms B Foster – Head of Care and Targeted Outcomes
Sue Green – Strategic Lead, Early Years, Families and Communities
Cllr O Gerrish – Portfolio Holder for Education
Ms E Sheridan – Electoral & Democratic Services
Sheila Coates - SERICC

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Reverend D Rollins.

2. ADDITIONAL ITEMS

The Committee agreed that the Call-In to Cabinet Decision 01104107 – Early Offer of help and Strategic Framework and Commissioning would be discussed as an item of Urgent business before Item 5 was considered. Following discussion of the Call-in report, it was agreed that the issues under the substantive item 5 had been fully covered and the item would not be discussed further.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

a) Interests

The following items were noted:

Councillor Diana Hale is a member of South Essex College Corporation

Councillor Cathy Kent has children attending St Thomas Primary School, Grays Convent School and Grays Media & Arts School. She is a Parent Governor at Grays Convent School.

Councillor Clare Baldwin has children at Hassenbrook School and Gateway Academy.

Councillor Mark Coxshall has a child at Hassenbrook School.

Councillor Charles Curtis is a Governor at the Ockendon School.

Mrs P Wilson is the Chair of Governors at St Thomas's Primary School.

Mr S Cray is a Parent Governor at St Clere's. He has a child attending St Clere's School and is a member of the East Tilbury School Collaboration Committee.

Mr A McPherson is the Chair of Governors at Aveley Primary School and has a child attending Aveley Primary School.

b) Whipping

No interests were declared.

4. MINUTES

The Minutes from the meeting of the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee, held on 15 March 2012 were approved as a correct record.

5. CALL IN TO CABINET DECISION 01104107 – EARLY OFFER OF HELP AND STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK AND COMMISSIONING

The item was briefly introduced by the Chair of the Committee who then invited Cllr Halden who made the Call-In, to introduce the reasons for the Call-in and the alternative proposals.

The Member introduced the call-in and stressed that he agreed with the aims of the strategy but had concerns regarding the number of children or families affected by the Early of Help, data extrapolation and the use of a blanket term for deprivation. He noted that consultation had taken place but it appeared to be focussed on internal council agencies and not the wider community and multi agency involvement. The issue raised regarding troubled families was the lesser of the 3 concerns as the Early of Help would overlap but the Strategy should be frontloaded, not retrospective. The Member stressed that the aim of the call-in was to be constructive and the call-in had therefore provided as much information as possible to assist with that aim.

The Strategic Lead for Early Years, Families and Communities was invited to respond to the points raised in the call-in. Officers are fully aware that one size does not fit all and acknowledged the links to troubled families. With regard to deprivation, officers had looked at a

range of factors and the areas highlighted within the strategy are where there is a correlation. The services commissioned will be fluid to meet changing needs but they are aware that a high level of referrals come from the deprivation factors. It was explained that the Early Offer of Help Strategy is a brand name beneath which there will be wide range of services tailored to meet the individual needs of the child.

The data in relation to 3000 children was clarified and it was confirmed the Early Offer of Help would work with the whole family. They also clarified where the data had been drawn from. It was noted that only families that need and want help will get it; those who are managing but still fit the criteria will not necessarily access help. Although specific areas of deprivation are noted in the Strategy this did not exclude families from elsewhere in the Borough; they would be provided for by Outreach Services.

The Head of Care and Targeted Outcomes explained the Troubled Families program and confirmed this was a requirement of the Munro report and crucial to future inspections of the Council. The Committee heard that the Troubled Families program was aimed at specific families and Local Authorities had been invited to bid for a grant based on assisting families with three specific characteristics, namely school attendance, worklessness and anti-social behaviour. The program is designed to tackle problems and the Local Authority has to do something innovative. The grant of £400,000 is a payment by results grant and in order to receive the top up, the Local Authority will need to demonstrate a change for the named families in the Borough. The program will target 360 families over a three year period (120 families per year) and the Government will define the criteria for success. Many families reached by the Early Offer of Help Strategy will not have all the characteristics required to meet the Troubled Families program specification but the families targeted by the Troubled Families program will be a subset of those within the Early Offer of Help Strategy.

The Strategic Lead for Early Years, Families and Communities explained in detail the consultation that had taken place in drawing up the Strategy and the regard they had taken to feedback received from agencies. The Head of Learning and Universal Outcomes confirmed that Voluntary and Private Sector partners had been invited to the recent Ofsted Inspection and had responded positively.

The Portfolio Holder for Education thanked members of the Committee for dealing with the call-in promptly and stressed that there is a need to implement the Strategy quickly. He outlined that officers had given a good sense of where the Early Offer of Help strategy lies and had addressed issues raised by the call-in.

Councillor Coxshall, who also made the call-in asked for clarification of the 3000 families or 3000 children affected. He stated that the Cabinet

paper is wrong and should be corrected and questioned other figures which may also be wrong as a result. The Head of Learning and Universal Outcomes confirmed that the figures should be 3000 children and the families of those 3000 children.

The single point of entry was clarified to the Committee. It was noted that referrals would be made by an agency likely to be already involved with the family and the Council would assess the family and seek assistance from partner agencies as required.

A member of the Committee expressed concern that multi-agency involvement had worked well at the Ockendon School for many years and was concerned that the call-in would delay the work and harm children.

Councillor Halden outlined that they did not wish to veto the strategy but wanted to improve on something that is already very good, especially in regard to data extrapolation. He expressed the need to better engage with Ward Members during the implementation of the strategy as elected members knew more about their wards than officers. Officers confirmed that they had previously spoken to both major groups.

The Chair confirmed that the strategy is due to be fully implemented by April 2013 and it was confirmed that the procurement process had been due to start the previous week but had been delayed due to the call-in. Procurement cannot commence until the call-in is resolved. The procurement process was explained further and it was confirmed it had been structured to attract a wide range of providers from small to large and would be open to everyone in the community.

Members of the Committee debated the outcome of the call-in and agreed that they did not want to delay the process but also discussed the involvement at ward level. A concern was raised that defining the strategy by ward may lead to identification of specific families if the ward was not an area of deprivation.

Councillor Halden confirmed that the issues identified within the call-in had been addressed by the debate and the Committee reached a consensus that the call-in should be rejected subject to the reasons and points outlined below:

RESOLVED that the call-in is rejected subject to

- a) **there would be clarification and amendment if required, of the figures used in the papers submitted to Cabinet, especially in relation to the number of children affected (3000) versus the number of families affected, the subsequent percentages expressed, and associated monies required; and**

b) The Head of Learning and Universal Outcomes is asked to take the lead on further engagement during the implementation of the strategy with ward members and communities and take account of the Community Strategy during the process.

6. THE FUTURE ROLE OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY IN EDUCATION IN THURROCK

The Head of Learning and Universal Outcomes introduced this item and informed the Committee that the paper had been brought to enable a debate about the future role of the Local Authority in Education in Thurrock. Attention was drawn to the Local Government Association report detailed in paragraph 2.1.3 of the report and the changing role of the Authority in relation to Academies. It was suggested to the Committee that they might invite Academy Heads to a future meeting and receive their feedback. The Committee were invited to discuss the key approaches outlined in Table 1 of the report. The approaches were the outcomes of the result of a national project and members were asked to note that the approaches were not mutually exclusive and a combination could be chosen.

The Chair responded that she was pleased that the report had come to Committee but the discussion would be richer with input from head teachers and she would welcome the discussion later in the year with their involvement.

The issue and clarification of 'bringing forward new provision' was raised. Officers informed the Committee that the intention is to identify new provision, perhaps to support schools to become academies or encourage free schools.

Members focused on approach no. 1 – Tighter Focus and Retrenchment and discussed that this option cannot be discounted. They discussed that the local authority should be targeting the more vulnerable children and officers agreed but highlighted the key approaches should not be taken to the exclusion of other approaches.

The committee discussed the term 'expert commissioner' especially in relation to the future of the Pupil Referral Unit (PRU). The Head of Learning and Universal Outcomes confirmed that legislation had now changed and they were able to consider whether a commissioned approach is an alternative consideration. Very early discussions had taken place with the Department of Education and Management had been bought in for the PRU. The Chair reminded the Committee that they were still able to visit the PRU if they wished and they should contact officers to arrange the visit.

A reference was made to strategy planning issues within the report and members sought reassurance as to how they would not occur in the future. Officers confirmed the robust procedures in place in relation to school planning and that they were committed to refining the formula used to capture issues every year.

A few members questioned the lack of detail regarding budgets within the report and how this made it difficult to agree the recommendation. Councillor Halden observed that he trusted Governors and Academy Heads more than Officers whilst the Chair, Portfolio Holder for Education and the Officer responded that it was not appropriate for the inclusion of budget detail as the report was about the strategic positioning for improvement in Thurrock and the relationships with schools, not a tight scrutiny of the budget. It was reiterated that the report was for debate.

The Direction of Travel was questioned and the Head of Learning and Universal Outcomes clarified that the key approaches were the result of a national project and will be revisited throughout the year. It was suggested that the report be brought back to Committee with outside speakers invited to add value to the discussion. It was confirmed that the report will stay within Overview and Scrutiny and that officers would seek expertise from schools to determine how the local authority is meeting objectives regarding school improvement and what needs to change.

A vote was held on the recommendation. Six members agreed the recommendation and three members voted against.

RESOLVED that

- a) **the Committee note the contents of the report; and**
- b) **the Committee endorse the direction of travel proposed regarding the future role of the LA in Thurrock.**

7. VERBAL UPDATE ON OFSTED SAFEGUARDING AND LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN INSPECTION

The Head of Care and Targeted Outcomes gave a verbal update on the process of the recent Ofsted Inspection which had taken place between 11 and 22 June. The Committee were informed that the Council will receive the draft report by 6 July, had until 13 July to submit queries to Ofsted and the final report would be available to the Council on 20 July. The report will be made public on the Ofsted website on 27 July. The officer was pleased to report exceptional support for the Inspection and noted outstanding examples of team work. Ofsted was very clear though on the seriousness of releasing embargoed information but they looked forward to receiving the report.

8. THURROCK VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS (VAWG) STRATEGY – MARCH 2012

The Head of Care and Targeted Outcomes introduced this item and Sheila Coates from SERICC was welcomed to the meeting. The Committee were directed to the document from Professor Liz Kelly and the challenging list of actions. The need for a Working Day to tighten up the Action Plan was discussed and it was requested that the item was then brought back to Committee. Members were invited to feed back on priority areas.

Sheila Coates addressed the Committee and highlighted that there are only three places in the country with such an action plan. However it was noted that it was an enormous piece of work and it had taken 30 years to get to this point. There were concerns regarding terminology and agreed understandings and that this is a very specialised piece of work. There is a need to ensure that the plan affects the lives of women and children and is not just a paper chase. Officers confirmed that the Strategy is also being taken to other Overview and Scrutiny Committees.

Members questioned the knowledge and referral process of the police regarding violence against women and children. Sheila Coates reiterated that it is not just domestic violence, it is all violence against women and this highlighted the issue of definitions.

The 16 day fortnight was raised and officers clarified that this was not a clerical error but referred to 16 days of action and the hope to launch the strategy in a celebratory way.

The Committee discussed military bases and queried the need to support both the perpetrator and the victim in such instances where there were wider issues.

The officer was asked to specify three key achievements and responded that they would like a victim survivor group to appraise the work undertaken and to have made changes to bullying, sexual bullying, internet abuse and gender based behaviour. Sheila Coates responded that she would like to see agreed definitions, the policy integrated into policies of the Council, a difference made to internet abuse and sexual bullying plus to give a voice to victims.

RESOLVED that

- A) That the proposed action plan and proposals for a local strategy to combat Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG), drawn up in response to Professor Kelly's recommendations**

and the proposed statement of principles set out in the report, be noted: and

- B) That the Committee support the proposal of the Stay Safe Sub-Group of the CYPP for a launch of the local strategy to combat Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) during the November 16 day fortnight.**

9. WORK PROGRAMME

The Chair asked the Committee to consider the draft work programme and feedback comments or omissions to the Chair and Officers. Officers were asked to align the reports to meeting dates and ensure that the Children and Young Peoples Plan priorities were added to the programme.

The Chair highlighted that co-opted members were all from an Educational background and there was no representation from Health. In order to change this an amendment to the constitution was required and the Chair was minded to take this forward. Initially this would be addressed by inviting persons with specific expertise to contribute as required, to items on future agendas.

The meeting finished at 9.30 pm

Approved as a true and correct record

CHAIRMAN

DATE

**Any queries regarding these Minutes, please contact
Elaine Sheridan, telephone (01375) 652580,
or alternatively e-mail esheridan@thurrock.gov.uk**